

YOSEMITE

NATIONAL PARK

"A national park, preserved in all its beauty and at the same time made accessible to the public for all time, is as grand a heritage as it is possible to leave to future generations."

— Robert Bradford Marshall

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 30

January 2007

Dear Yosemite Friends,

Ten years ago on New Year's Eve, Yosemite National Park experienced one of its largest floods on record. It inundated campgrounds and employee housing units. It destroyed roads and park offices. But the flood of 1997 also reminded us how national parks are places where important natural processes prevail.



While the anniversary of the flood is not necessarily something to celebrate, we have accomplished a great deal in the wake of that event. Two flood-damaged bridges and a dam have been removed from the Merced Wild and Scenic River; new employee housing dorms have been constructed at Curry Village; and 6.5 miles of the El Portal Road have been reconstructed. Still, there is much to do. To protect park resources and the experience of visitors,

it is vital that we continue with important projects in Yosemite Valley, which are currently enjoined by the U.S. District Court (see article page 4).

In the meantime, this newsletter will bring you up to speed on the planning efforts currently underway. Because of a court ruling, we will soon open public scoping on a new Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan. The Tuolumne River Plan, which completed the public scoping process last fall, is moving forward with greater opportunities to involve you (see pages 4-5). And an environmental assessment for repairs to the El Portal Road (near one of the park's most heavily used intersections) will be ready for release later this spring (see page 7).

We look forward to sharing more with you throughout 2007.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Park Superintendent



Photo by Steve Thompson

The flood of 1997

Tuolumne River Plan

The purpose of the Tuolumne River Plan is to provide long-term, comprehensive guidance for the management and protection of the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River. Required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, this will be a broad, programmatic plan that lays out the types of facilities and activities that will be allowed—or not allowed—in the river corridor.

Tuolumne Meadows Plan

The Tuolumne Meadows Plan will be a more detailed implementation plan. It will focus on the specific preservation programs and services appropriate to meet the Tuolumne River Plan's protection and visitor experience goals in Tuolumne Meadows.

Because they are so closely related, the two plans will be analyzed under one environmental impact statement (EIS).

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The Planning Update is a publication of the National Park Service, Office of the Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, P. O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389.

Kristina Rylands compiled this issue with contributions from Mark Husbands and Jen Nersesian.

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Tuolumne Planning: Public Scoping SUCCESS

From June 27 through September 7, 2006, the NPS engaged in the earliest stages of the public process for the Tuolumne planning effort, known as *public*

scoping. This is when members of the public—and park staff—are asked to brainstorm and share ideas, concerns, suggestions, and comments about the kind of Tuolumne experience they would like to see preserved for the future.

The planning team spoke with legions of people at over 13 public open houses (3 of which were in Tuolumne Meadows), and an August public walk-about in Tuolumne Meadows was a huge success. In addition, NPS Tuolumne interpretive rangers encouraged people to engage in the process at

campfire programs, ranger walks, and day hikes, reaching an astounding 6,500 Tuolumne visitors. This resulted in 466 letters, faxes, and emails, which were distilled into over 4,000 distinct comments.

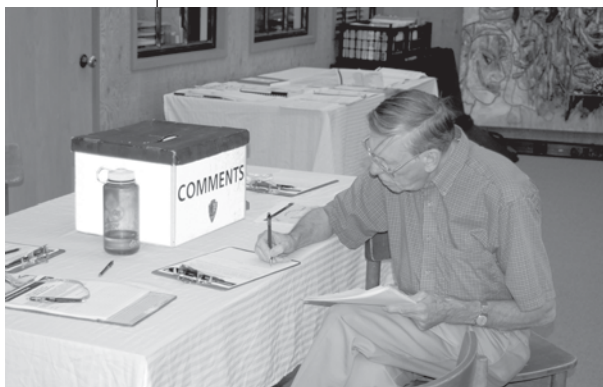


Photo by Jen Nersesian

Public Meetings

Over 13 public meetings were held during the scoping phase for the Tuolumne planning effort.



Photo by Jen Nersesian

Location, Location, Location

Parsons Lodge served as an ideal Tuolumne Meadows meeting venue. Meetings were also held in Yosemite Valley, Oakhurst, Mariposa, Sonora, Groveland, Modesto, San Francisco, and Lee Vining.



Photo by Jen Nersesian

Walk & Talk

In August, the NPS planning core team met with members of the public in Tuolumne Meadows to discuss a range of issues that may be addressed as part of the Tuolumne River Plan and Tuolumne Meadows Plan.

The NPS core planning team is very excited about the passionate ideas and targeted suggestions folks have shared. Perhaps the points most clearly voiced were that Tuolumne is a very special place, a portal to wilderness, an experience far different from that of Yosemite Valley...one that must be protected and preserved.

But public involvement doesn't end with a written letter. This winter, there will be additional opportunities to engage in the process and share your ideas. (See "Tuolumne Schedule Update" on next pages.)

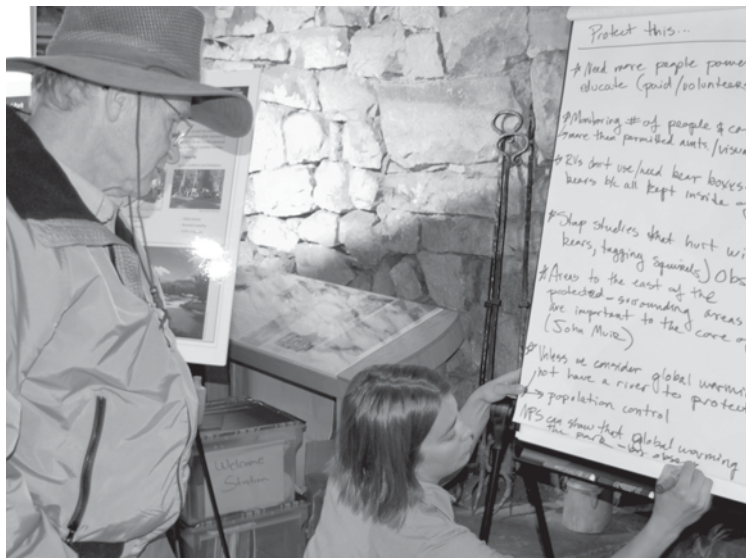


Photo by Jen Nersesian

Capturing Your Comments

NPS planning team member, Alexis Mayer, jots down a participant's ideas and concerns at a Tuolumne Meadows public meeting. The "flip chart notes" from 13 public meetings will be posted to the park's website.

Tuolumne Planning News

www.nps.gov/archive/yose/planning/trp/trpblog.htm

Check out Yosemite's newest public involvement tool—the Tuolumne Planning News Web Log or "Blog." In the weeks and months to come, project manager, Kristina Rylands, will post the latest information about the status of the Tuolumne plans.

Here's a sample:

"Over the course of the last year, many of you have provided feedback on our communication process. Lots of people commented that Yosemite planners seem to disappear into a BLACK HOLE, only to emerge some months later with a multi-volume document fit for a door-stop. The purpose of this blog is to give you up-to-date information on where we are in the process, as well as share with you some of what we are hearing from the public and experiencing around the planning table."

SCOPING RESULTS ONLINE

All individual scoping letters, along with a Public Scoping Report can be viewed online at www.nps.gov/archive/yose/planning/trp/scopingreport.htm

Litigation Update

Merced River Plan

In July 2006, U.S. District Court Judge Anthony Ishii set aside the 2005 Revised Merced River Plan, indicating that the NPS failed to prepare a “new or revised plan” in keeping with the 9th Circuit Court’s 2003 directive. He also ruled that the plan’s user capacity program violated the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act because it did not establish a total number of users that the river corridor could accept.

In October, the NPS sought approval from the court to proceed with a list of projects while a new plan could be developed. Many of the projects included maintenance and restoration efforts that were intended to protect park resources while providing for visitor safety. A November 3, 2006 ruling enjoined all requested projects, except for those that only involved activities related to ongoing planning. Some of those projects halted include:

- Upgrading aging utilities to modern standards
- Resurfacing the Yosemite Valley Loop Road
- Creating a new footbridge from Happy Isles to the John Muir Trailhead
- Improving the Valley Loop trail

In December, the NPS presented the court with a timeline for completing a new Merced River Plan, and on January 9, 2007 the judge is expected to make his final ruling. In addition, the NPS has initiated the process to appeal the July 2006 ruling.

Yosemite Valley Plan Lawsuit Filed

On December 28, 2006, plaintiffs Friends of Yosemite Valley and Mariposans for the Environment and Responsible Government filed a legal challenge to the 2000 Yosemite Valley Plan and several other Valley projects. Park management is consulting with NPS counsel to understand the implications of this suit and to consider the NPS response. Additional information will be available soon, and the complaint can be viewed on the park’s website at www.nps.gov/archive/yose/planning/litigation/

Tuolumne Schedule UPDATE

To better coordinate with the planning timeline for the new Merced River Plan effort, the schedule for the Tuolumne planning process has been adjusted. With summer 2007 originally slated for the release of a Draft Tuolumne River Plan, Tuolumne Meadows Plan, and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), that target has shifted. Instead this summer, the NPS team will publish and release for public comment a newsletter containing Preliminary Draft Alternatives for the Tuolumne River Plan. These preliminary concepts will include such river management elements as:

- Definition of river boundaries and classifications
- Descriptions of river values
- Desired conditions/management prescriptions
- Management zoning configurations

This document will NOT contain environmental analysis, nor will it propose a “preferred alternative.” Instead, it will contain reader-friendly explanations of the preliminary concepts for establishing river protections in accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, with full-color photographs, maps, and graphics. The goal is to allow the public to respond to initial concepts before coming out with a fully analyzed EIS.



Photo by Jen Nersisyan

Wild and Scenic since 1984

A total of 54 miles of the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River flow through Yosemite. This status ensures that the river will be protected in its free-flowing condition.



Seasonal Wilderness Outpost

Tuolumne Meadows is generally only accessible by road during the summer months. During that time, the store and grill bustle with activity. In winter (below), Tuolumne's facilities are largely vacated and the area is visited by cross-country skiers and showshoers.



"We have great momentum behind us and an incredible amount of support from the public to see this plan through to its completion," remarks Linda Dahl, Yosemite's Chief of Planning. "We intend to use this additional year to repeatedly touch base with the public on how best to protect the Tuolumne River."

Tuolumne Meadows Scoping to Re-open Summer 2007

In addition to accepting comments on these preliminary river concepts, the NPS will re-open public scoping on the Tuolumne Meadows Plan. This is in response to comments heard during last summer's public scoping process. In particular, some felt that they could not adequately comment on actions that might take place in Tuolumne Meadows until there was a sense of what the Tuolumne River Plan might propose.

February Public Workshops

In the meantime, this February three public planning events will take place in Yosemite Valley. The first will be a "Yosemite Forum" presentation on the many scientific studies conducted last summer in support of the plan. (See pages 6 and 7.) Also two public planning workshops will be held, giving the public the opportunity to join the Tuolumne team around the planning table. The goal is to not only share the planning process with the public, but to give participants an opportunity to inform alternatives development.

All workshops will take place at the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center Auditorium from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. If you plan to attend, please RSVP by email to Kristina_Rylands@nps.gov, or leave a message at the Yosemite Planning Hotline at 209/379-1365.

Planning For Summer

This planning schedule has been arranged to take advantage of the season when Tuolumne is readily accessible. Not only is summer a prime time to reach out to interested visitors, it's also when a great deal of useful information can be gathered.

For the next two summers, draft documents will be available for review when Tuolumne is most accessible to the public. The Tuolumne planning team will be back this summer for more public meetings and "planning walks" to talk about how best to protect this special place.

Save These Dates

Events below take place in the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center Auditorium

"YOSEMITE FORUM"

PUBLIC PRESENTATION:

LEARN ABOUT LAST SUMMER'S TUOLUMNE RESOURCE STUDIES

February 6 at Noon to 2:00 p.m.

"PLANNER FOR A DAY" PUBLIC WORKSHOP: RIVER VALUES AND MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS

February 10 at 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

"PLANNER FOR A DAY" PUBLIC WORKSHOP: MANAGEMENT ZONING

February 24 at 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

NPS OPEN HOUSES

- January 31
- February 28
- March 30

Learning About Tuolumne



Photo by Jim Bacon

Trail Assessments

NPS employee Crystal Elliot works on formal trail assessments in Lyell Canyon with students from the park's environmental education program, Yosemite Institute.

While the public process for this planning effort kicked off in summer 2006, park staff have spent months preparing for the development of the Tuolumne River Plan and Tuolumne Meadows Plan. Part of this process involves asking the following questions:

- What do we know about the area?
- What information needs to be updated?
- What additional information do we need?

To answer some of these questions, researchers and NPS resource specialists have been conducting studies to support the Tuolumne plans. Some of these studies included

- Rare plants and invasive species in the river corridor
- Hydrologic conditions in Tuolumne Meadows
- Mapping of the 100-year floodplain and the river's ordinary highwater mark
- Archeological site analysis
- Assessing the effects of trampling in portions of Tuolumne Meadows
- Soundscape studies
- Trail condition assessments
- Cultural landscape inventory of Tuolumne Meadows
- Scenic analysis of Tuolumne Meadows



Photo by Jen Nersisian

In Tuolumne, Life is Short

Literally and figuratively! Because of the long winters and brief summers, the window of growth opportunity for Tuolumne's plants is extremely narrow. Here, Mariposa lillies grow close to the ground, while the foothill variety bloom on stems up to a foot tall.



Planning Issues

The effects of roadside parking along the Tioga Road through Tuolumne Meadows emerged as a key issue to be addressed in this planning effort.

These are just some of the studies that have taken place to provide greater baseline information for the Tuolumne River Plan and Tuolumne Meadows Plan. In addition, the planning team examined existing resource conditions and visitor experiences in Tuolumne Meadows, asking the questions, “What’s working?” and “What’s NOT working?” and “How can we better protect this special place?”

YOU ARE INVITED: February 6 Yosemite Forum

Learn more about these studies and the results of public scoping by attending the YOSEMITE FORUM. This event will take place February 6, 2007 from Noon to 2:00 p.m. in the Yosemite Valley Auditorium (behind the Visitor Center).

Other Planning News

Planning Underway for El Portal Road Reconstruction

This project seeks to implement a long-term solution for certain sections of the main road entering Yosemite Valley that are being severely undercut by the Merced River. The NPS had secured funding to complete repairs to the 1-mile flood-damaged section of road between the Big Oak Flat intersection and Pohono Bridge. However, due to litigation, the project will only focus on the portion of road that is most severely weakened.

Public scoping took place from November 14 to December 28, 2006. The National Park Service is now reviewing public comments and will prepare a scoping report by mid-January. An Environmental Assessment will be available for public review in late March. For more information on this project, or to receive a copy of this document when it is available, send a postcard to Yosemite Planning, using the return address on this newsletter; fax your request to 209/379-1294 or email yose_planning@nps.gov.

Economies and Connections

Just as gathering scientific data on the condition of resources strengthens a planning process, so does examining the socioeconomic environment. To better understand the inter-relationships between park planning and surrounding communities, Yosemite's Division of Planning has initiated a series of workshops facilitated by the nonprofit Sonoran Institute (www.sonoran.org). In October 2006, interested community members and representatives were invited to the kick-off session in Mammoth; later this month, a second workshop will be held in Mariposa. For more information, send an email to Yose_Planning@nps.gov, fax 209/379-1294, or leave a message at 209/379-1365.

Sign up for the Yosemite
Electronic Newsletter
www.nps.gov/yose/home.htm



Photo by Mark Fincher

Tioga Pass Entrance Station in Winter

Around The Corner

In the weeks to come, look for additional information and public involvement opportunities for the following projects:

- Kick-off of the process to establish El Portal Community Design Guidelines
- Release of the following environmental assessments (EAs):
 - Glacier Point Road Rehabilitation EA
 - Hetch Hetchy Microwave Project EA
 - El Portal Road Reconstruction EA
 - Hodgdon Meadow Employee Housing EA
- Opening of public scoping for the following projects:
 - NEW Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan/EIS
 - Tunnel View Rehabilitation EA
 - Yosemite Museum Master Plan EA



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Thanks for your help!